Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

Hughes Loved But One

Sources close to the late Howard Hughes agree on at least one thing: Jean Peters was the only woman he ever loved and probably the only woman who ever loved him.

The brooding billionaire met her, according to our sources, at a party in the late 1940s. As she burst into stardom, Hughes assigned a bodyguard-spy to stick close to her when her film work took her away from Hollywood.

This constant companion reported back to Hughes how the actress spent her time. Sometimes, she would step out with other stars such as Joseph Cotten and Marilyn Monroe. More often, she would stay in her room and work on crossword puzzles.

Our sources say Jean Peters was annoyed over the Hughes watchdog and the stage whispers he generated. But the billionaire insisted that the security man stay at her side.

In the mid-1950s, a man named Stuart Cramer sat down next to her on an airliner. They became friends and were married.

Far off in Miami, holed up in the old Columbus Hotel, Hughes continued to keep watch on the attractive actress. Once he dispatched a security man to observe the Cramers on a fishing cruise.

It turned out to be a short, Hollywood marriage, lasting only about a month. About two years later, Jean Peters abnandoned her acting career, became Mrs. Howard Hughes and disappeared into his shadowy world.

Our sources caught fleeting glimpses of their strange life together. They leased a home, for example, in Bel Air, Calif. But before Hughes selected the house, he ordered round-the-clock guards to keep people out of six prospective mansions. They remained empty for three months until Hughes was satisfied that they were germ-free.

While Hughes closeted himself in his bedroom, Jean tried to behave like a normal housewife. One Sunday, she dispatched an aide to buy a mop so she could tidy up behind the servants. But the billionaire's wife had no money. The aide had to borrow $5 from a friend to buy it.

Because of Hughes' reclusiveness, Jean also became shut off from the world. For awhile, her relatives would visit, and invariably would want to meet "Uncle Howard." But Hughes would never see them.

Jean Peters finally obtained a divorce from Hughes in 1970 after 13 years of marriage. By remaining hif wife, she could have claimed a large share of his multibillion-dollar fortune today.

But those who know the actress say she wanted to live her own life and was happy to settle for a $150,000 home and $50,000 a year alimony for life. She has now settled down to a quiet life with her third husband, Stan Hough, in the Los Angeles environs.

Report Denied

Associated Press

Commerce Secretary Elliott L. Richardson termed ridiculous a report that he initiated a leak of confidential information while Under Secretary of State six years ago in order to get President Nixon's attention, a Commerce Department spokesman said.

Jack Anderson and Les Whitten reported last Thursday that a Pentagon investigation quoted a former Richardson aide as saying that he leaked confidential information to Daniel Ellsberg at Richardson's orders.

The former Richardson aide, Charles M. Cooke Jr., was quoted in the Pentagon report as saying "Richardson apparently desired a leak of this data to focus President Nixon's attention in it, which he had been unable to do," Anderson reported.